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# Social capital as a determinant of implementation of sustainable development

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## ABSTRACT

The Sustainable Development Agenda 2030 adopted in 2015 and Sustainable Development Objectives included in it 17 cover a wide range of social aspects. Implementing sustainable development refers to achievement well-being of individuals and entire societies as well as building and strengthening social capital. In the article, using desk and web research analysis, an indicatory approach to social capital and sustainable development is presented. The aim of the article is to identify relations between social capital and sustainable development. Selected methods of measurement sustainable development and social capital in the Polish scale are presented.

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## Introduction

Social capital and sustainable development (SD) are two key terms which in recent years have become very popular in scientific research and investigations and also in compiling strategic documentation at the international, national, regional and local level. In the course of time both concepts have also undergone many variations of definitions and measurement methods. The document accepted in 2015: *Transforming Our World: the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development* (hereinafter referred to as Agenda 2030) and the 17 Sustainable Development Goals which it incorporates relate mainly to social aspects, and Ban Ki-moon, the Secretary General of the United Nations stressed that the *essence of the Agenda is people and our planet* [United Nations 2016]. However, it is not possible to implement sustainable development without achieving a state of general wellbeing of the individual and entire societies.

The article presents, with the use of desk and web research, an approach to social capital and sustainable development using quota indicators. The purpose of this article is to indicate the effect of social capital on sustainable development. Selected methods of measuring sustainable development and social capital in Poland have also been presented.

## 1. Defining social capital

Social capital is the basis (often the determining factor) of a civil society, *governance*. It is also a condition necessary for the socio-economic development of local units, regions and countries. It's a condition for prosperity and wellbeing (two key elements for sustainable development) of individuals and society. This is the course of events, as social capital is what is the most important in society, it is the very fabric of society built upon interpersonal relations, ties and social relations [Sztompka 2010, 45].

At the outset of these deliberations it is worth stressing that social capital is a concept which is defined by various areas of knowledge, and therefore it is difficult to single out one binding definition. M. Theiss [2007, 12-13] suggested, for the OECD Centre for Educational Research and Innovation, various ways in which social capital can be understood, indicating::

- the anthropological approach – concentrating on natural and biological foundations on which people form associations, groups and models of social order,
- the sociological approach – concentrating on social norm research and social organization characteristics (norms of confidence, citizen engagement networks),
- the economic approach – assuming that people strive to achieve individual benefits in engaging in interaction with others and through social capital achieve common, group goals,
- the political sciences approach - dealing with issues relating to the effect of institutions and political and social norms on human behaviour. The research is on the significance of social capital in the reduction of poverty or sustainable development.

It is worth noting that for the subject under discussion here, the political sciences approach with a direct correlation to sustainable development is of key significance.

Research on social capital has seen wide-scale expansion from the 1980s. The concept was popularized through the works of P. Bourdieu, R. Putnam, J. Coleman, M. Woolcock (in Poland along with the works of P. Sztompki and J. Czapiński). In recent years research no longer refers only to the definition of approaches, but also concentrates on establishing the effect of social capital on the level of regional socio-economic development, innovativeness and competitiveness.

Social capital is expressed in various ways (Table 1) which makes its measurement all the more difficult.

In addition to definitions of the subject drawn from literature, there are also operational definitions, contained in strategic documentation. The Polish *Human Capital Development Strategy 2020* (HCDS) states that social capital is the capacity of citizens to mobilize and combine resources, emanating from a sense of confidence and the binding norms and procedural models, which are conducive to creativity and increased willingness to cooperate and agreement in achieving common goals [*Strategia Rozwoju Kapitału Społecznego 2020*, 2010, 37].

To sum up, it can be said that social capital is made up of a variety of ties and dependencies so that one is able to distinguish:

- inclusive social capital, in other words, bonding. It applies to ties to the interior – it is characteristic for all homogenous groups, resembling ties which prevail in the family, it leads to a state where one is closed to the competitive cultural concepts, it is based on a strong sense of loyalty within the group;
- exclusive social capital, that is, the kind that bonds; these are ties directed outwards, less intensive than in the case of inclusive capital, but characterized by increased openness to other cultural models, it is typical of heterogenic groups [Sierocińska, 2011, 73-76].

**Table 1. Selected definitions of social capital**

Author	Defining social capital
F. Fukuyama	<p>He perceives social capital as a basis for a stable liberal democracy and the effective functioning of a modern economy, also constituting an informal norm of cooperation between individuals.</p> <p>He identifies social capital with confidence and the capacity resulting from its dissemination in society or its part.</p>
R. Putnam	<p>Social capital is the engagement of citizens in the community, and the more mutual norms and social engagement networks there are, the simpler the cooperation becomes.</p> <p>Social capital comprises : confidence, norms and a network of associations. Social capital is therefore a public good.</p>
P. Sztompka	<p>Social capital comprises:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• cultural capital, that is, basic communications skills, relations with others, with whom we create communities,</li> <li>• symbolic capital, that is, the ability to read and interpret symbols in texts, pictures, works of art,</li> <li>• moral capital which is related to the presence of specific ties, i.e.: confidence, loyalty, solidarity, mutuality and tolerance</li> </ul>

Source: Fukuyama, 1997, 39; Fukuyama, 2001, 7–20; Putnam, 1995; Putnam, 2008; Sztompka, 2010, 45–46

Theoretic studies emphasize the advantages to be gained from social capital by society and the individual. Therefore, support for activities which help to create and strengthen social capital is of key importance.

## 2. Social capital in strategic documentation

Since social capital is of key significance in development processes, including the implementation of sustainable development, the question arises, how is social capital expressed in strategic documents which are essential in forming development policy<sup>1</sup> in Poland? The most important strategic documents in the management system for development in Poland were selected<sup>2</sup> for analysis, i.e.: the National Regional Development Strategy (2010), the Responsible Development Strategy (2016).

<sup>1</sup> It is worth stressing here, that the development policy in Poland must take into account the principle of sustainable development, in accordance with Art. 5 of the Constitution of the Polish Republic.

<sup>2</sup> No strategic document was indicated as a direct reference to sustainable development, as Poland has no current sustainable development strategy.

**National Regional Development Strategy 2010-2020. Regions, towns, rural areas (NRDS)**

The aim of the strategic regional policy set down in the document is *“effective use of specific regional and territorial development potentials to achieve the country’s development goals – an increase in employment and cohesion in the long term perspective”*[ *Krajowa Strategia Rozwoju Regionalnego 2010-2020*, 2010, 7, 71]. There are secondary specific goals in the achievement of a strategic goal, which in various ways relate to social capital, as depicted in Table 2.

**Table 2. Reference of NRDS goals to social capital**

Specific NRDS goal	Reference to social capital
Supporting the growth of regional competitiveness	<p>The activity in 1.3 “Building the Foundations of Competition in Voivodeships – thematic activities” is devoted to the problem of social capital in the scope of (1.3.1) “Intellectual Capital Development, including Human and Social Capital”.</p> <p>An analysis of proposed directions encompassed in the goal indicates that they include above all education and the labour market.</p>
Building territorial cohesion and countering processes of marginalization in problem areas	<p>For the purposes of cohesion, in activity 2.1 “Strengthening Cohesion in the National Structure”, “Development of Human Resources and Human Capital Formation” was proposed as a way forward. The ventures in this area include local development (also cultural) and social capital development – support for local social initiatives, introduction of social integration programs, development of continuing education for adults.</p> <p>Analysis of all the proposed ventures indicates that, as in goal 1, the main emphasis in the activities is on the human capital problems.</p>
Creating conditions for successful and effective achievement of development activities through partnership, targeted territorially	<p>The issues of building social capital are reflected in goal 3 (relating to capacity) “Creating conditions for efficient, effective and partnership-based cooperation in achieving development activities, targeted territorially”. In activity 3.4 “Building Social Capital for Regional Development Based on a Cooperation Network Between Various Regional Policy Actors”, the following was provided for, amongst others: networking of processes connected with conducting pro-development activity, increasing information flow between regional policy actors.</p>

### **Responsible Development Strategy (RDS)**

The main goal of RDS is creating conditions for the increase of profits of Poland's residents while increasing cohesion in the social, economic and territorial sphere. Achieving a goal expressed in this way is to, in the long term, limit social exclusion and poverty in the social sphere, and also lead to the creation of strong social capital and increase its role in development. Out of the three specific goals (goal I – permanent economic growth based on both existing and new advantages, goal II – sustainable social and territorial development, goal III – an effective nation and economic institutions which are conducive to growth and social and economic inclusion), social capital is particularly emphasized in goal III, where the increase of the share of social capital in the socio-economic development of the country was acknowledged as a topic area having an effect on the achievement of the Strategy goals. The document emphasizes the importance of the organization of a civil society, cooperation based on confidence, innovativeness and development of creative entrepreneurship. Strategic projects from this area, expected to be achieved the perspective of 2020 are: Civic Society National Support Program, Youth Solidarity in Action and Community in Action, that is, a package of bottom-up ventures with a goal to improve the quality of residents' lives (creating permanent neighbourhood and community ties, and resolving local problems through confidence and cooperation)<sup>3</sup>.

Both the Strategies discussed are also of key significance in launching sustainable development in Poland – they relate to SD principles, and RDS is a document with direct reference to Agenda 2030 which emphasizes the need for wide-ranging partnership to achieve sustainable development goals.

### **3. Social capital as an element of sustainable development goals**

Sustainable development as a concept (idea) which has developed since the end of the 1960s is evolving along with the challenges and problems of global development. The most frequently quoted definition, derived from the Brundtland report, maintains that sustainable development is development which meets the needs of current generations without restricting the ability of future generations to meet their own needs [World Commission on Environment and Development (Brundtland Commission) 1987]. Each of the over 100 SD definitions in use emphasizes the efforts involved in achieving an integrated system, that is, a positive state of targeted development changes merging in a cohesive and non-conflicting way the component structures, namely social order, the economic and environmental systems (as the three main elements), the institutional and political systems, and spatial order [Borys

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<sup>3</sup> The provisions of the Strategy should be acknowledged as showing promise in the context of building social capital. However, other activities influencing the climate around social organizations, including the attack conducted by the public media for their activity at the end of November and beginning of December 2016, may cause an irreversible loss of confidence and a fall in the social capital of Poland which is already low in any case.

2011, 75-81]. The sustainable development goals set out in Agenda 2030 have, in large part, an integrated nature referring to more than one type of order (Fig. 1, Table 3).

**Fig. 1. Sustainable Development Goals**



Source: [www.undp.org/content/undp/en/home/sustainable-development-goals](http://www.undp.org/content/undp/en/home/sustainable-development-goals)

**Table 3. The goals adopted in *Transforming Our World: the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development* – reference to SD structures**

Goals (numbers in accordance with fig. 1)	Reference to SD structures ***
2, 7, 9, 11	s,g,e
1, 3, 8, 12	s,g
6, 13	s,e
4, 5, 16, 17	s
10	g
14,15	e

\*\*\*three main systems are examined, i.e.: social (s), economy/economic system (g) and environmental/ecological (e). The analysis took into account the way forward for activity within individual goals.

Source: study using [www.undp.org/content/undp/en/home/sustainable-development-goals/resources.html](http://www.undp.org/content/undp/en/home/sustainable-development-goals/resources.html)

In analysing the provisions of the way forward for activity within the 17 SD goals we can conclude that the following goals refer directly to social capital: goal 11 (Sustainable Cities and Communities), 12 (Responsible Consumption and Production), 16 (Peace, Justice and Strong Institutions) and 17 (Partnerships for the Goals).

#### 4. Measurement of social capital and sustainable development – in search of interdependence

The measurement of social capital is complicated, as in empirical research it is difficult to measure the capacity which something has, confidence, networks or relations between individuals and groups. Such measurement of sustainable development is not simple, as either synthetic, integrated indices are necessary, or each of the SD structures is measured separately.

The following were analysed in the search for the dependency and effect of social capital on sustainable development: sustainable development indices (and their connections with social capital indices) and the quality of life indices.

The sustainable development indices in the EU are a set of 130 indices, of which 10 are acknowledged to be main ones, that is, those indicating if and what progress is being made in the implementation of SD at EU level [*Wskaźniki zrównoważonego rozwoju Polski*, 2015, 39]. The module of SD indicators of Poland encompasses 101 indices<sup>4</sup> divided into 4 systems (Table 4).

**Table 4. SD indices in Poland and their relations with social capital**

SD Structures	No. of indices	Indices relating to social capital ***
social	31	0
economic	29	0
environmental	29	0
institutional and political	12	7 Indices relating to the area of Civil Society – citizens' openness and participation and citizens' activeness (indices: Turnout in parliamentary and local authority elections, Percentage of households with access to broadband internet at home, Percentage of persons using the internet in contacts with public administration, Index of confidence, Percentage of persons engaged in voluntary work)
TOTAL	101	7

\*\*\* The approach to the subject of social capital defined in the Strategy for the Development of Social Capital (SRKS) was applied to the analysis, that is, reference to confidence and cooperation

Source: : *Wskaźniki zrównoważonego rozwoju Polski 2015*, 52, 56-335

<sup>4</sup> In 2015 40 indices were added as compared with 2011.

According to the data set out in Table 4 and data published by GUS (the Central Statistical Office of Poland) indices referring to social capital are those, amongst SD indices, in which Poland is achieving one of the weakest results, e.g.:

- the percentage of persons using the internet in contacts with public administration authorities in 2014 was 26.9% (an increase of 3.3 percentage points as compared with 2008), whilst the EU average was 47%,
- the confidence index in 2012 was 12.81, whilst the EU the average was 15.4,
- the percentage of voluntary unpaid workers in 2014 was 20% (a fall of 4 percentage points as compared with 2004), while according to the *Human Capital Development Strategy 2020* provisions, this index should reach 37% by 2020.

Sustainable development is implemented so that a high standard of living can be achieved [Borys 2011, 77]. GUS, in assessing the quality of life in Poland in 2015, took into consideration 9 aspects [*Jakość życia w Polsce 2015*], amongst which were ones referring to social capital, i.e.: nation and fundamental rights, the level of citizens' activity (indices connected with confidence in institutions, e.g., confidence in local authorities – 49.5% in 2015, participation as voluntary workers in organizations – 10.3% in 2011), leisure time and social recreation (index of confidence in other people – 78.4% in 2015<sup>5</sup> and percentage of people carrying out unpaid individual work (work for the benefit of others) – in 2011 a value of 25.9%).

## Summary

Both social capital and sustainable development are ambiguous categories, difficult to measure. Research and theoretical investigations indicate that social capital has an effect on economic development and improvement of the quality of life at the regional and local level, although unequivocal empirical proof is difficult to provide.

It is worth noting that the exclusive, binding, social capital is crucial for the implementation of sustainable development. Its counterpart is Putnam's social capital, so-called bridging capital and institutional collectivism.

As mentioned in this article, the modules of sustainable development indices also contain indices of social capital, and confidence and cooperation enable the sustainable development principles to be implemented with greater success (e.g. the principles of inter- and intra-generational fairness and also the principles of participation). Activity involved in building and strengthening social capital also leads to achieving integrated order.

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<sup>5</sup> The trust index according to *Badania spójności społecznej*, the percentage of people (in households) of 16 years or older declaring that they definitely have confidence or trust in people in general.



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## Kapitał społeczny jako determinanta wdrażania rozwoju zrównoważonego

### STRESZCZENIE

Przyjęta w 2015 r. Agenda na Rzecz Zrównoważonego Rozwoju 2030 i zawarte w niej 17 Celów Zrównoważonego Rozwoju dotyczy w dużej mierze aspektów społecznych. Implementowanie rozwoju zrównoważonego ma bowiem służyć osiągnięciu dobrostanu jednostki i całych społeczeństw oraz budowaniu i wzmacnianiu kapitału społecznego. W artykule, z wykorzystaniem analizy *desk i web research*, prezentowane jest podejście wskaźnikowe do kapitału społecznego i rozwoju zrównoważonego. Celem artykułu jest wskazanie powiązań (relacji) kapitału społecznego i rozwoju zrównoważonego. Zaprezentowane zostały także wybrane sposoby pomiaru rozwoju zrównoważonego i kapitału społecznego, w skali Polski.

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